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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to raise awareness and stimulate debate about the family as a focus for developing learning in the United Kingdom (U.K.). The discussion focuses on the following aspects of the issue: the nature and scope of family learning; families as a place for learning; context; development of family learning; patterns of provision; provision for family learning in practice; partnerships in family learning; aims and objectives of family learning; principles for supporting family learning; policy and resourcing issues; and the future of family learning. The main recommendations stemming from the discussion are as follows: (1) wider opportunities for family learning, including parent education, should be available to all families; (2) coordination of policy and provision for families is in urgent need of improvement at the national and local levels; (3) television and other media should take a lead in raising the family's learning profile and participation in family learning programs; and (4) the U.K. government should aim to secure adequate funding for family learning so that everyone has access to affordable, appropriate, and effective support at each stage of life. Specific recommendations for 13 different U.K. agencies are also presented. The bibliography contains 11 references. A list of policy working group members concludes the paper. (MN)

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Riches Beyond Price

Making the Most of Family Learning

Titus Alexander and Peter Clyne

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A NIACE Policy Discussion Paper

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Titus Alexander & Peter Clyne

A NIACE Policy Discussion Paper
June 1995

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Executive Summary

1. The main aim of this policy discussion paper is to raise awareness and stimulate debate amongst interested agencies and practitioners about the family as a focus for developing learning. This goes beyond the narrow confines of parent education or education for parenting, and so the paper considers the wider social implications of learning in families. The extended and intergenerational family still exists, despite substantial changes in its social environment. The paper identifies examples of good practice which are offered as useful models for practitioners.

2. Families are a vitally important place of learning, in which people develop values, attitudes, behaviour, skills and knowledge that create the foundation and context for life-long learning.

3. Families today are immensely complex and varied. Family life is changing rapidly as a result of constant economic, social and technological change.

4. These changes create an urgent need for greater support and education for family members as they face each stage of life. Effective family learning is also the most important factor for educational achievement in school, personal well-being, and prevention of crime, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour.

5. At present, education and support for families is provided by a confusing patchwork of agencies. Adult education is one of many services which offer opportunities for family members to learn together or develop skills for different stages of life.

6. Most effective provision for family learning is organised by agencies working together according to clear principles, as set out in the paper.

7. The main recommendations are that:

   (a) opportunities for family learning, including parent education, should be available to all families

   (b) co-ordination of policy and provision for families urgently needs to be improved at national and local levels

   (c) television and other media should take a lead in raising the profile of and participation in family learning, much as *On the Move* boosted adult literacy in the 1970s

   (d) government should aim to secure adequate funding for family learning, so that everyone has access to affordable, appropriate and effective support at each stage of life.

The report also makes specific recommendations for adult education, local authorities, Training and Enterprise Councils, employers, Ofsted, initial teacher training, schools, FEFC, higher education and government departments.

Introduction

Families are the main context of learning for most people. Learning within the family is usually more lasting and influential than any other. Family life provides a foundation and context for all learning. Values, attitudes, behaviour, language and a vast range of skills are learned or shaped at home. Family life can be a source of inspiration and personal growth, stimulating learning throughout life. But family experiences can also cause stress, distress and even illness, damaging personal development and inhibiting learning. Support and encouragement for family learning strengthens the foundation for life-long learning.

This paper aims to focus discussion on how we as a society support and encourage life-long learning in relation to families. It is written for adult learners and educators as well as all agencies concerned with policy, provision or funding for families and education. Adult education has a varied and innovative role in family learning, usually in partnership with agencies such as community health, social services, schools, colleges, universities, voluntary organisations, the media and many others.

Part One presents an outline of the context, history and key issues about learning and families. Part Two is a brief survey of existing provision, illustrated with a few practical examples. Part Three draws together aims and principles from best practice and concludes with recommendations for action.

We hope that this paper will be used to improve the way we work together. It does not present the policy of NIACE or its members, but aims to highlight issues in an informative and challenging way.

Part One

Cinderella of the Education Service

Family learning is not formally defined in the education service, although the importance of parents and home background for educational achievement is widely recognised. This section looks at the definition, context and historical development of family learning in order to focus on how we can support it better.

1 What Is Family Learning?

1.1 Family learning is as varied as families themselves. For the purpose of this paper it is worth identifying five distinct aspects of family learning:

- informal learning within the family
- family members learning together
- learning about roles, relationships and responsibilities in relation to stages of family life, including parenting education
- learning how to understand, take responsibility and make decisions in relation to wider society, in which the family is a foundation for citizenship
- learning how to deal with agencies that serve families, such as schools, health services, social services, voluntary organisations and the criminal justice system. Most of these agencies have distinct agenda or concerns which they impart to families with whom they work.

1.2 The common feature of these five aspects is that they involve intergenerational learning based on kinship, however defined. This definition is not determined by function, but by the complex continuity of relationships, that is the essence of human life. The first two aspects of this definition focus on families as a context for learning, while the other three concern content. All five aspects overlap in practice. Learning about family life inevitably feeds back into the reality of learners' own family circumstances, while family members learning together also learn about each other, whether they are learning French or fishing.

1.3 Most provision for families is concerned with specific functional tasks. These are often highly specialised but fundamentally simpler than the complex diversity of family life. Thus the formal education system of nursery, school and college offers intergenerational learning between unrelated individuals, grouped by age, ability or interest. Most agencies are organised around specific stages in life or particular problems, such as antenatal care, child abuse, divorce or care for the elderly. While many agencies increasingly recognise the importance of involving the wider family, their specialised role inevitably cuts across the complex diversity of family life.

2 Families as a Place for Learning

2.1 As a context for learning, families are often more intimate, intense and continuous than any other. Learning within the family usually arises from specific cultural traditions, the need to deal with different life stages, leisure interests and interpersonal relationships. The range and extent of learning within families varies greatly, depending on family traditions, opportunities and encouragement. Difficulties within the family may lead individuals to distance themselves from it. Yet even after a person has withdrawn or left entirely, their family experiences can retain a powerful influence.

2.2 Some families actively learn and do many things together, but social and economic influences tend to encourage people to do things with their own age group, whether children, men, women or elders. This is reinforced by the functional specialisation of most organisations, which target specific groups of customers or clients.

2.3 Learning about family roles takes place largely within the family. Many cultural and family traditions are an explicit form of family education, teaching about each life stage through story, ritual, imitation, play and instruction. But social change and the fragmentation of families means that many of these traditions have disappeared or are no longer appropriate.

2.4 People are most likely to seek advice and support when they experience difficulties with a new stage in life. Apart from antenatal classes, there is very little provision which enables people to prepare positively for different life stages. Most family services deal with problems once they have reached a crisis.

2.5 Many agencies, such as schools, health services and the police, are beginning to recognise the value of working in partnership with families to do their job better. It would be more productive if such services saw their main job as providing professional support to enable families and the community to solve problems themselves. This would mean designing services around families' needs for learning and support, rather than expecting families to find their way through a maze of provision. This patchwork of provision is being increasingly criticised for its lack of coherence and co-ordination.

2.6 Learning to participate is the foundation of democratic citizenship, which starts with family relationships. Involvement in playgroups, sports, school meetings, youth groups and other civic activities associated with family life is a natural extension of these four other aspects of family learning. As society becomes even more complex, technological and fragmented, this aspect of family learning will become essential for social cohesion.

2.7 The central question is the extent to which family members are the key decision-makers over the content, direction and forms of learning. Where these are imposed on families, they are usually ineffective, often inappropriate and sometimes counter-productive. This has to be understood in terms of the context and historical evolution of family learning.

3 Context

3.1 Families today are immensely complex and varied. Few people now live in an extended family, with relatives nearby to provide support and pass on skills from one generation to another. One marriage in three ends in divorce. Many children live with only one parent or have a step-parent or live with other relatives. For children in care, 'family' may mean a series of foster homes or institutions. For older people, 'family' means relationships with grown-up children who may live some distance away, fraught with anxieties about support as they grow more frail. In this paper, 'the family' refers to the wide range of intergenerational relationships in which people actually live.

3.2 Family learning is profoundly influenced by social circumstances. All families are affected by rapid technological change. Assumptions about an older and more experienced generation teaching young people about the world are no longer valid. Often it is the other way round. Economic and social pressures make it hard for many families to spend time together. Women in particular face multiple demands from work, family and community roles. Poverty, unemployment, poor housing and lack of opportunities make it difficult for many families to function effectively. Black and ethnic minority families often face additional pressures as a result of racism, cultural differences, language barriers and lack of appropriate services. Disability within families confronts people with immense challenges, often cutting them off from wider society. These are all circumstances which need to be addressed if we want families to be part of an inclusive society.

3.3 Family life is not a happy experience for many people. A survey by NHC Action for Children suggests that at least 750,000 children in Britain suffer long-term trauma as a result of domestic violence (NCH Action for Children, 1994; see also NSPCC, 1994). Over 36,000 children are on the Child Protection Register. Over 7000 cases of sexual abuse were reported in 1992. It is estimated that one in eight adults was beaten or abused as a child. The numbers who suffered from constant criticism or emotional neglect are much greater. For many people, this experience is their only education in family life.

3.4 Experiences within the family have a profound influence on people's learning and life chances. Many studies show that home background is the most significant single factor in educational achievement at school and in later life. Poor parenting is associated with low achievement and even criminality in later life. Where there is abuse, conflict or neglect, or parents/carers are stressed, depressed and unable to cope, family life can cause terrible suffering, permanent damage and long-term disadvantage.

3.5 Difficulties within families can impose huge costs on society. Educational under-achievement, mental illness, child protection and crime mean that society has to spend large amounts of money on dealing with failure. These costs are very high. It costs local authorities on average £34,000-a year to look after a child full-time. A place in a secure unit costs about £100,000. The costs of caring for an elderly person in a home or hospital are of similar magnitude.

3.6 Most public provision for families is aimed at coping with the consequences of family breakdown or dysfunction. Very little exists to prevent issues within the family becoming problems or to help people create effective families.

3.7 Education and support for families is provided by a confusing patchwork of agencies. Provision varies greatly from place to place. A recent study of

policy and practice in parent education by the National Children's Bureau, *Confident Parents, Confident Children*, describes a wide range of good work across the country (Pugh *et al.*, 1994). But it concludes that 'there are substantial gaps and a striking lack of coherence and co-ordination.' The Audit Commission (1994) has similarly criticised the fragmentation and lack of co-ordination and strategic planning for family services in *Seen But Not Heard*. Both reports present detailed recommendations for improving provision and education for families, which are consistent with the specific proposals in this paper.

3.8 Comprehensive support for family learning at all stages of life would enable families not just to cope, but to thrive. Good family learning would enable family members to deal with difficulties and respond to opportunities more positively. This would reduce the need for spending on the consequences of family breakdown. Social investment to support learning within the family would therefore benefit society as a whole as well as individual family members.

3.9 Recognition of the importance of parenting skills and family learning is growing. The UN International Year of the Family (IYF) in 1994 increased awareness about 'Building a More Family Friendly Society'. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Parenting Matters produced a number of very important recommendations to improve support for parents (All Party Parliamentary Group on Parenting Matters, 1994). These are consistent with the proposals at the end of this paper. *Concern for the family did not end with the International Year. We want to ensure that adult education plays an active role in supporting family learning for the rest of this decade and beyond.*

4 Development of Family Learning

4.1 For the greater part of human history, the extended family and immediate community were the main source of learning for most people. Work and religion, the other main sources of learning, were intimately linked with family life. Industrialisation and the increasing complexity of society made systematic education essential for everyone. But the development of formal education overlooked the importance of families as the foundation of learning throughout life. Family learning became the preserve of faith communities, voluntary organisations, the media and agencies set up to deal with difficulties associated with family life.

4.2 Organised religion continues to support family learning within faith communities, but its overall importance has declined over the past two centuries. In Britain, Islamic communities and faiths other than Christianity tend to be more active in family education.

4.3 In the nineteenth century, family education was a significant element of the work of churches, socialist Sunday schools, the temperance movement and emerging voluntary youth organisations. University settlements and social action centres in working-class areas made close links between subject-based education and community-based recreation for the family. Work-related intergenerational learning involved teenage boys with their fathers and girls with their mothers.

4.4 The 1870 Education Act increased family learning through after-school activities and junior, men's and women's institutes. The main emphasis was on basic skills and vocational training, with a broader academic education available only to a minority.

4.5 In the 1920s and 1930s, a new emphasis on health and welfare became an explicit focus of family learning. Initiatives such as the Peckham Experiment in London, the pre- and post-natal clinics on large council estates built between the wars, and the patchwork of pre-NHS services established a pattern of family learning relating to health, welfare and medical matters that continues to this day.

4.6 The Plowden Report, *Children and their Primary Schools* (1967), was a milestone in the expansion of parent and family education. The report emphasised the importance of home background for achievement at school. This inspired many initiatives to create partnerships between parents, schools and communities. These included Educational Priority Area (EPA) projects, funded by central government, parents' and family rooms in primary schools, the first home–school liaison teachers and family workshops. Many of these projects continue in some form. They have also been joined by home–school schemes for reading, maths, science and other activities. Parental involvement in secondary education never had a boost like the Plowden Report and never developed to the same extent, although there are a few good examples across the country.

4.7 During the 1960s and 1970s, many Local Education Authority adult education services provided courses on preparation for marriage, parenthood and child development, usually in conjunction with churches and the health service, related to role performance in families. These have largely gone from adult education programmes and are more likely to be provided directly by churches, the health service or specialist voluntary organisations, such as the National Childbirth Trust, Exploring Parenthood and the Parent Network.

4.8 From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s many youth and community wings and adult education centres were built in conjunction with new secondary schools. A second wave of community schools and colleges was designated in Cumbria, Coventry, Leicestershire and elsewhere, following the 1930s and 1940s programme in Cambridgeshire. Although many local authorities have been forced to cut back on community education, support is available from agencies such as the Coventry-based Community Education Development Centre. The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) 'Education Service for the Whole Community' initiative made funds available for local initiatives to strengthen partnerships between school and post-school providers and voluntary agencies. For over a decade family workshops, home-visiting schemes, creche provision and a wide range of childcare courses flourished across the capital. Most of this has gone or been severely cut following abolition of the ILEA in 1990.

4.9 The Russell Report, *Adult Education: A plan for development* (DES, 1973), and the Alexander Report in Scotland (Scottish Education Department, 1975), gave a new impetus to parent and family education through community education and outreach work. These reports stressed the importance of adult educators working in partnership with other professionals and community activists to increase learning opportunities. Community education workers reached out to people who were unwilling or unable to come into schools, centres and colleges in order to set up more appropriate provision closer to home. Many family workshops, home-link and home-visiting schemes, parents' centres and parents' projects were established at this time. The Community Education Development Centre developed a national programme of support, training, innovation and publishing for a wide range of family learning.

4.10 During the 1970s and 80s many black and ethnic minority groups set up supplementary schools and community education projects in order to promote the values, cultures and languages of their own communities, which were often totally absent from mainstream schools. Many of these initiatives have influenced and enriched mainstream education.

4.11 The Taylor Report, *A New Partnership for Our Schools* (1977), led to increased representation of parents and the community on school governing bodies. Parents' position as 'consumers' of school education was strengthened by several Acts of Parliament during the past 15 years, which significantly increased the information available to parents, their involvement and schools' responsiveness to parents.

4.12 Interest in parenting education grew during the 1970s and 80s. Many initiatives were stimulated by the Seebohm Report on Social Services and the concern of the Secretary of State for Social Services, Sir Keith Joseph, that a 'cycle of deprivation' was transmitting personal and social problems from one generation to another. These initiatives were aimed at low income groups in very deprived areas within the framework of community work in social services departments.

4.13 At the same time, another strand of parenting education was developing in the context of psychotherapy and personal growth. These courses were largely influenced by parent education programmes in the United States, such as Thomas Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training (PET). They were aimed mainly at more affluent parents who could pay for courses or were offered as part of therapeutic programmes for parents experiencing severe difficulties.

4.14 The development of different forms of family learning during the past hundred years has produced a huge variety of provision and a very substantial body of experience. Most of the attention has been on mothers and young children, with relatively little emphasis on the role of fathers, the concerns of families with adolescents or the issues associated with old age in families. Perhaps the largest areas of concern have been around parenting and parents' involvement in their children's schooling. Much less attention has been given to supporting families as the first and most important context for *all* learning, and to encouraging family members of all ages to continue learning together throughout life.

4.15 Family learning has been the Cinderella of public education. Education, health, social services and other agencies have been reluctant step-parents. It is rarely invited to the public spending ball. When the International Year of the Family struck midnight we were left with a golden slipper of recommendations and family learning went back to its rags in the ashes of society.

4.16 Society at the end of the twentieth century is more diverse and subject to much greater pressures from economic, social and technological change than ever before. The possibilities for learning within and through the family are greater than ever before, as new technology delivers increasingly powerful information to the home. Support for family learning needs to rise to these challenges, or we will simply abdicate our future to advertising, cartoons, computer games and a virtual reality beyond control.

Part Two

The Ragged Patchwork

Provision for family learning is very diverse and fragmented. It includes a huge variety of activities run by many different agencies for a wide range of purposes and motives. Family learning is hard to organise into administrative categories, since it is as varied as family life itself. This section looks at support for family learning in terms of the definition given earlier and stages of life, together with practical examples.

5 Patterns of Provision

5.1 One way of looking at these is in terms of the five aspects of the definition of family learning given on page 6:

(a) **informal learning within the family** is largely supported from the family's own resources through the media (particularly television, video and film), faith communities, public libraries, parks and voluntary organisations, especially clubs and societies for arts, sports and leisure activities

(b) **family members learning together** is mainly supported by cultural and recreational bodies, as well as adult education, family and community centres, schools and some health promotion programmes

(c) **role education** was traditionally provided by the older generation and faith communities, but now relies increasingly on an inadequate patchwork of provision as documented in *Confident Parents, Confident Children*

(d) there is little direct provision for **families and citizenship**, apart from encouragement for people to participate in running playgroups, school governing bodies, community organisations and other agencies

(e) **partnership initiatives** by agencies such as schools, community health services, libraries or social services are probably the largest and fastest growing provision for family learning. These schemes try to involve families in fulfilling the agency's purpose, so that school-based schemes are aimed at improving test results, health services promote family health education and the Home Office sponsors family projects to prevent crime, vandalism or substance abuse.

5.2 Friends, family, television, film, magazines and the press are the main sources of information on relationships, parenting, citizenship and other intergenerational issues. Domestic and leisure activities are probably the main focus of families learning together, much of which is provided by the commercial and voluntary sector. There is relatively little provision for systematic learning about parenting and relationship skills. What there is, is largely run by voluntary organisations, including faith communities. Most provision in the statutory sector is in response to crisis or the result of failure in family relationships – picking up the pieces, rather than preventing breakdown.

5.3 A more common way of looking at provision for family learning is in terms of life stages and the needs of particular groups. This is more practical from an organisational point of view and can help to highlight gaps in provision, but it makes the diversity of family learning needs seem simpler and more functional than they are:

(a) Antenatal care and childbirth are relatively well provided for by community health services and the National Childbirth Trust, but they tend to emphasise the biology of birth and babies, with less attention to the complex emotional, social and economic changes in relationships between parents, other siblings and wider networks.

(b) Postnatal support is less well developed, with health visitors as the main form of public provision, and some initiatives such as Newpin and 'community mothers' projects.

(c) Pre-school education and childcare is provided for by the Pre-School Learning Alliance, Homestart and other voluntary groups as well as nurseries, with varying degrees of family involvement.

(d) Many schools engage the whole family in children's learning, which also encourages adults to continue their own education. The Department for Education Guidelines on special needs puts a positive emphasis on involving parents in the statementing process, which is increasing support for some parents.

(e) Relationship education is largely informal, with a small amount of provision through PSHE and sex education in schools, youth clubs and faith communities. Learning about family life in schools has declined as a result of the National Curriculum and greater emphasis on examination results.

(f) Adolescence is often a difficult and much neglected stage of family learning, with provision fragmented between parents, street culture, declining youth services and, when things go wrong, the police, probation and prison services.

(g) Vocational choice is a critical stage, where opportunities to involve family members in providing information, mentoring and work experience are largely neglected.

(h) Preparation for parenthood is largely confined to antenatal care and classes, mentioned above, with some wider provision within faith communities.

(i) Parenting education for families with children is growing, mainly through voluntary organisations like Parent Link, Exploring Parenthood and the Veritas programme among churches.

(j) Pre-retirement courses are provided by employers and some adult education services, but these rarely involve wider family members and are being cut from adult and further education since funding is increasingly tied to accredited vocational courses.

(k) Older adults, from newly-retired to frail elderly, may seek the stimulus of new ideas, company and support from younger people which comes from the traditional liberal adult education that is also being cut back in most areas.

(l) Finally, families need sharing and support in bereavement, which can be difficult to find and is available mainly through voluntary organisations or commercial counselling.

5.4 There are also specific groups which may need particular support for learning, such as:

- black and ethnic minority communities, whose needs are often inadequately catered for in mainstream provision
- refugees, whose families may be shattered and who often have few connections with local communities when they arrive
- carers, who need to draw on wider family and community support as well as share experiences with others in similar roles, which is mainly available through voluntary organisations
- people with learning difficulties or disabilities, who are often ghettoised in specialist segregated provision
- victims of crime rely almost entirely on voluntary organisations, as do prisoners' families
- addicts and their families have particular needs for education and support, largely provided by 12-step programmes and health services with relatively little emphasis on education.

5.5 This sketch of provision available at different stages of life or to particular groups conveys something of the diversity of family learning needs and patchiness of provision. It leaves out important areas such as leisure, arts and recreational activities through which many families learn together. These activities may even help families to meet the challenges of life better than the more specialised provision listed above. In practice both are needed.

6 Provision for Family Learning in Practice

6.1 The following paragraphs briefly describe examples of current provision.

6.2 Parent Network is a voluntary organisation which works alone or in conjunction with other statutory or voluntary services. Its Parent Link courses are run by and for parents. They cover communications and relationships in families by sharing experiences, practical exercises and published materials. Courses are suitable for parents with children of any age, including elderly people and their middle-aged children, but most of the work has related to nursery and primary age children and their parents. Newpin developed out of Parent Link as a support network for new and prospective parents.

6.3 The Pre-School Learning Alliance offers a range of family education courses, sometimes funded by local authority departments. These include general courses on parenting and special courses on first aid in the home, learning through play, language and learning. Such courses are often arranged in co-operation with schools and adult education providers. For many mothers they are an important step into further education and a professional career.

6.4 The Child Development Programme for new mothers began in 1980 in Bristol and is now run in over 25 health authorities, with over 15,000 new families every year. It offers new parents support in the rearing, nutrition, health and all-round development of children. It is based on partnership and empowerment of parents, involving a structured programme of monthly visits by a professional health visitor. Support continues with trained voluntary 'family visitors' or 'community mothers'.

6.5 Contact a Family (CaF) is one of a number of voluntary organisations which encourage mutual support between the families of people with

disabilities or special needs, built upon enhanced knowledge and understanding.

6.6 Leisure and recreation departments of local authorities, private sports clubs and holiday camps provide family activities which include structured coaching and learning which, in many cases, are indistinguishable from parallel provision by adult or community education services.

6.7 Between birth and school-leaving age at 16 children spend less than 15 per cent of waking time in school. This makes it particularly important for teachers to encourage parents to become actively involved in supporting their children's learning and to make partnerships with parents and carers central to the way in which schools work.

6.8 In his Final Report (1994) on the National Curriculum and its Assessment, Sir Ron Dearing states '... if ways could be found to involve mothers and fathers in the initial teaching of reading we would make a huge contribution to the raising of educational standards.'

6.9 An increasing number of primary and secondary schools offer opportunities for parents and/or grandparents to learn together with school-age children. Sometimes these programmes have adult educators and school teachers teaching together. In other situations, children move from the school environment to be taught in an adult education setting. In both cases children's behaviour often becomes more mature and their motivation improves. Arrangements sometimes exist for adults to join an existing timetabled school course. Sections 12 and 13 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 give schools the power to directly provide further education for adults. For some schools, this is the means whereby they can offer family learning on school premises involving school-age children and adults.

6.10 Liverpool's Parent School Partnership incorporates several of these different strands in its approach. Since 1979 parent support workers have been based in schools to:

- enrich children's learning by bringing together the resources of home and school
- create an atmosphere in which parents feel secure and valued
- acknowledge and value parents as educators
- enhance achievement and raise expectations through a positive attitude to partnership
- encourage greater openness and joint involvement of parents and school managers in policy-making and the daily life of the school.

6.11 Similar projects are now widespread on Merseyside. The Open College Federation also offers courses for parents, teachers and community workers. Parents get credit and recognition for their work, which can lead to further education and employment. Many Merseyside schools have parents' rooms where courses and leisure activities take place, such as FAST (Families and Schools Together) in Bootle.

6.12 For over 25 years, adult education agencies have provided many different family education programmes, usually for parents and young children. Home-visiting schemes have supported and encouraged mothers to understand the development of their young children and to learn how to play with them and assist them in their pre-school development. Family workshops involve pre-school and/or primary age children learning together

with adults across aspects of arts, crafts and design technology curriculum areas. Some family workshops are being used as locations for family literacy projects. Parent governor training is also provided by many adult education services.

6.13 For some parents, becoming involved in their child's education can rekindle their own interest in learning. For parents whose own experience of school was difficult, such involvement can be daunting. Schools, alone or in conjunction with adult education bodies, can do much to overcome such negative experiences. In some communities, schools have become the first point of contact for advice, support and referral for a wide range of services.

6.14 The Basic Skills Agency (formerly the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, ALBSU) has been funded by the Department for Education and Welsh Office to support Family Literacy initiatives. Four intensive demonstration programmes have been launched in Cardiff, Liverpool, Norfolk and North Tyneside. Over 200 projects have been funded through the Small Grants Programme. An essential element of all projects is that they are based on partnerships between many agencies and aim to improve parents' literacy and confidence as well as children's learning. In February 1995, the BBC and The Basic Skills Agency launched a major initiative using television and radio to promote parents and children reading and writing together, supported by free educational resource packs. Teaching and learning materials were also produced to encourage teachers, adult literacy tutors and librarians to build in literacy skills in the home. There was a huge public response to the educational support materials, with requests for 315,000 parents' packs, 6000 organisers' packs and 1000 librarians' briefings. The initiative clearly caught the imagination of the whole range of agencies concerned, and encouraged collaboration.

6.15 The broadcasters have helped to focus public attention on family matters through a wide range of mainstream programming, usually with telephone helpline and backup materials. The BBC produced *Living with the Enemy* about teenagers, as well as series such as *Nanny Knows Best* offering a mentoring role, *What Shall We Tell the Children?* on sex education, and 60 programmes through three series on 'family affairs'. As an independent broadcaster, Channel 4 began an ongoing commitment to Citizen 2000 as a series in 1994, the UN International Year of the Family. Other features such as *Look Who's Talking* and *Coping With Grown-Ups* focused on particular family issues.

6.16 The Open University is an important provider of family education programmes, from *The First Years of Life, Parents and Teenagers* through to *Planning Retirement*. These are supported by a large amount of innovative learning materials as well as links with local agencies. Since 1977 over 36,000 people have participated in *The Pre-School Child* and the materials have been used by over 151,000 people, making it the OU's most popular community education programme. This course is now being updated.

6.17 Intergenerational learning in visual and performing arts and languages, involving teenagers and their parents, has taken place for many years. These subjects, when taught according to traditional adult education processes of negotiated curriculum and methods, serve to strengthen solidarity between generations.

6.18 Family education in a residential setting is particularly important for family members who, for reasons associated with social and economic circumstances or disability, have not the opportunity to learn together away

from the familiar and, therefore, constraining environment of the home, school or adult centre.

7 Partnerships in Family Learning

7.1 The adult education service rarely works alone in supporting family learning. Most good practice illustrated depends on close collaboration between agencies and different professional skills. For example, parents, early years teachers, medical and paramedical specialists and adult educators work together in planning and running family education programmes at the Newham Parents' Centre, Pen Green Family Centre in Corby or the Marsh Lane Family Centre in Bootle. Family learning at one primary school emerged from consultation with parents and teachers; active members of neighbourhood voluntary organisations including church, tenants, residents and sports bodies; social workers, health visitors, doctors, librarians, youth and community workers, adult educators, playgroups and pensioners' groups organisers; all of whom contributed to the joint endeavour.

7.2 Health, social services and education staff co-operate in programmes for carers, as documented by the National Federation of Women's Institutes in *Caring for Rural Carers* (NFWI, 1993).

7.3 Educators and specialist voluntary organisations work together in community settings, such as Family Life and Marriage Education (FLAME) of the Church of England and Veritas, its Catholic equivalent.

7.4 School teachers and adult educators team-teach in family workshops in primary and secondary schools sponsored by Devon County Council community education programme. The Family Education Resource Network (FERN) provides vital support to projects across a sparsely populated rural area.

7.5 SCOPE in Hampshire offers a supportive network to families of children under five. Families are members, not clients, and participate in groups which build up confidence, knowledge and community contacts as well as deal with crises.

7.6 Although there is a wealth of examples of practical co-operation between agencies at a local level, very few agencies have drawn up a joint strategy for parenting education, as recommended by the National Children's Bureau. The London Borough of Waltham Forest approved a joint strategy involving arts and leisure, education, health, housing, libraries and social services, which is now co-ordinated by the Adult Education Service. Devon County Council recently launched an inter-agency curriculum policy for family education based on 10 years' experience.

7.7 In the United States, several states have launched major initiatives to restructure services for children and families. Washington State has set up a Family Policy Council which brings together the heads of all services that work with families, including education, health, social services, youth services and the justice system. At a local level Community Networks bring professionals and community representatives together to tackle problems from the bottom up.

7.8 Similar initiatives are long overdue in Britain, but professional boundaries, departmental hierarchies and inflexible funding regimes often create insurmountable barriers to responding to families' needs. Co-operation

between staff at a local level is often treated with suspicion or hostility by senior management. This is made worse by constant reorganisation and changing priorities imposed by central government. Over the past decade every service that works with families has been restructured independently of every other service. Although the Children Act and Care in the Community put more emphasis on inter-agency co-ordination, the shifting pressures on each agency make practical co-operation for family learning an uphill struggle.

Part Three

Building on the Best

Earlier sections summarised the history, context and current provision for family learning. Part Three draws together aims, principles and themes for the future.

8 Aims and Objectives of Family Learning

8.1 Family learning has a very wide variety of specific objectives which depend on its context and purpose. But many programmes share a few aims in common. These include the development of:

- self-awareness, self-knowledge, confidence and self-esteem
- values and attitudes
- personal communication skills, listening and assertiveness
- skills in problem-solving, handling conflict and dealing with stress
- understanding personal development at each stage of life (birth, childhood, adolescence, through to old age)
- understanding relationships with family, friends and wider social networks
- understanding issues of diversity and equality in relation to race, gender, disability, class and sexual orientation
- enjoyment of family life and shared activities
- skills and knowledge acquired elsewhere.

8.2 These broad aims emphasise skills, knowledge and values about personal and social development. Most programmes also have specific objectives relating to particular needs, such as literacy, preparation for parenthood, antenatal and postnatal care, parenting, health, bereavement, disability, crime prevention or promoting partnerships between home and school, not forgetting arts, leisure, sports and religious education.

8.3 Most research on effective families shows that these broad aims are the most important aspects of family learning. Yet they are often difficult to develop under the stresses of everyday life, work and school. This makes it particularly important that provision is planned in partnership with other agencies working with families.

9 Principles for Supporting Family Learning

9.1 Experience suggests that family learning works best when rooted in clear principles. The following principles reflect the experience from a wide variety of effective provision. They are neither absolute nor final, but a basis for development:

(a) Families and individual family members have learning needs by virtue of having to deal with stages of life and changing circumstances, as well as personal development, recreation and wider interests.

(b) Families are recognised as a crucial context for learning throughout life, learning from and with each other all the time.

(c) Schemes and services are planned in close co-operation with families for whom they are intended.

(d) Provision takes account of the fact that different people learn in different ways, and uses a mixture of methods including the media, group work and individual study.

(e) Family learning actively acknowledges and builds upon participants' own experience, skills, abilities and values.

(f) Family learning is involved with emotional, cognitive, social and cultural dimensions.

(g) The diversity of family patterns is acknowledged and respected. In particular, provision takes account of the fact that society is multicultural and multilingual, with differences expressed through different patterns of child-rearing, different traditions of intergenerational relationships and different attitudes to family life.

(h) Family learning is relevant to everyone, men and women, fathers as well as mothers, boys as well as girls.

(i) Provision takes account of the development of the whole person throughout the life-cycle, from birth to grandparenthood.

(j) Provision is enhanced by involving and training lay people from the community as well as, or even instead of, professionals.

(k) Provision is planned in partnership with other agencies in the context of local family support networks. Other agencies may include voluntary, private and statutory bodies.

(l) Family learning is seen in the wider context of economic, social and community life, including employment, housing, welfare, culture and religion.

9.2 These principles are neither absolute nor final, but a basis for development. They emphasise the strengths and capacity of learners rather than assumptions about deficiency. The fundamental principle is that intergenerational learning is valued and supported as part of the specific social context of each person.

10 Policy and Resourcing Issues

10.1 There is no statutory requirement for any form of family or parent education. *Confident Parents, Confident Children* and the All Party Parliamentary Report on Parenting Matters recommend that a choice of schemes and services should be available to families in every area. We believe that this is essential for healthy families and a cohesive, stable society. The costs of *not* providing adequate support for families to learn and develop effectively are already too great. We need an explicit commitment to provide adequate support for family learning and development from central and local government.

10.2 Much more emphasis needs to be given to co-ordinating family policy and provision at a national and local level. In practice, family learning has developed as a result of personal commitment by members of voluntary organisations, staff in statutory services or local politicians. As a result, provision is uneven and may be based in schools, libraries, the education department, social services, health clinics, adult education centres and

voluntary organisations with relatively little contact and no joint planning between providers. The result is duplication, low take-up and poorly targeted services.

10.3 Deciding which agency should co-ordinate support for family learning is a key issue. It is vitally important that family learning can draw on the wide range of specialist expertise of all agencies, but it should be promoted in the same way as universal public education, libraries and parks. In other words, family learning should not be seen as a service for people who cannot cope, but as a useful and enjoyable activity for everyone.

10.4 The particular location of family learning can make a great deal of difference to the values and emphasis of what is provided. In principle, we would argue that while all agencies should be involved, family learning is best provided within a welcoming environment open to all, such as a voluntary organisation, adult education centre, public library or community room in a school.

10.5 Professional workers can gain a great deal from understanding the processes of family learning. This is enhanced by multi-professional and multi-agency co-operation. Through co-operation, school teachers can gain insights into principles of adult teaching and learning. Educators can learn about counselling and group work skills from specialist health and social workers. Statutory service staff can learn from the experience, attitudes and styles of community activists. The design of a family learning programme is often improved by contributions from more than one single service or agency, as well as the views of the individuals and families concerned. Joint training and conferences for staff from different agencies together with parents is immensely beneficial.

10.6 Effective programme development and resourcing depends on local co-operation. In practice, every agency has different timescales, criteria and conditions for funding which often makes joint provision or training a bureaucratic nightmare. In the US, several states have passed enabling legislation to allow statutory agencies to relax their funding criteria in the interests of joint planning and provision of family services, including family education. Similar steps are needed to break down bureaucratic barriers here.

10.7 The additional funding needed for adequate support for family learning is difficult to estimate, since the amount of existing provision is so uneven, unco-ordinated and under-utilised. It is also likely that effective provision of family learning could eventually reduce spending on family breakdown. *Confident Parents, Confident Children* suggests that the equivalent of 0.5 per cent of the education budget (£170 million a year) could provide an adequate basis for a truly preventive approach to work with parents.

10.8 Quality control and inspection of family learning should be related to the particular nature and purpose of the activity. A family learning activity must be of measurable educational benefit to the participants of different generations. It must be measurably effective in delivering the learning outcomes sought by the participant learners and educators. At the same time, in some situations, there would be social or medical benefits sought by agencies outside the education service which have been equal partners in facilitating the activities. More attention needs to be given to in-depth, long-term evaluation of the benefits of different education programmes.

10.9 Progress in family learning also needs to be celebrated. The value of informal learning must be recognised in some way. Where appropriate it can

also be accredited. Flexible forms of accreditation such as the RSA Practical Skills Profile used by the City Lit Family Education Programme or the Open College scheme in Merseyside are a particularly valuable way of acknowledging achievement which encourages participants to continue learning. But the benefits of one person's learning experience on the lives of others is another measure of effectiveness not reflected in conventional methods of accreditation. For example, a child's attendance at school improves when the mother/father or carer attends adult education classes. Both the carer and the person for whom care is provided benefit from the carer's learning.

11 The Future of Family Learning

11.1 The increasing speed and complexity of social and technological change will make family learning even more important in the future. New cable and computer technology could bring high-powered information and resources for learning into every home. Without adequate support and encouragement, this is likely to be used by only a minority, while the majority are saturated by television advertising and entertainment. Family learning, in the future, will take different forms from provision in previous years as it responds to new situations and learning needs. In particular, the potential of television as a medium for learning in partnership with other agencies needs to be actively explored.

11.2 In view of the pressures, tensions and conflicts in families and neighbourhoods, it will be vital that family learning is accessible to those who need opportunities for personal change and growth. The interdependence of individuals within families creates a unique type of learning context.

11.3 Intergenerational co-operation and support will become ever more important as patterns of employment (full-time and part-time, male and female) continue to change while life expectation increases. Given the changes in population and employment profiles, family learning will need to enable people to cope with these and other enforced and fundamental changes. The ways in which families respond will depend on cultural traditions and values, the local circumstances and available options. Men need to be involved much more than in the past, and the needs of older people will need to be taken much more seriously.

11.4 During the past 20 years, there has been growing recognition that the state cannot cope with a wide range of social needs simply though public services. Greater community responsibility is needed to achieve improvements in health and safety at work and in the home, reduction in neighbourhood and industrial pollution, environmental protection and conservation, and health of the nation campaigns against tobacco, alcohol and drugs. All these have required forms of public education. In homes and families, the initiative is often taken by the youngest generation, who, because of school learning, are in a position to inform and, at times, influence older people. Family learning, involving a range of agencies and services, will be a necessary force in achieving the desired results.

11.5 By starting from where people are in their family settings and relationships, family learning can be a vivid example of the best adult education traditions. This will be essential in the years to come as existing structures struggle to keep up with a rapidly changing world.

12 Conclusions

12.1 Family learning can bring great educational, social, economic and emotional gains for learners. It also offers many benefits to society by helping to prevent problems caused by difficulties that arise within families. Family education programmes are worthwhile extensions of the work of all educational establishments, from nursery to university. They can be a valuable element in the work of many agencies, from health authorities to social services. The processes and content of family learning can enrich people's lives and the community in ways that cannot be measured by mere money.

12.2 Accreditation of family learning and validation of courses have brought recognition as part of mainstream of education, but many of the benefits are deeper and more tangible. Family learning gives many women opportunities for access into other forms of learning or employment. Older people gain continuing enjoyment and contribute to the community through family learning programmes. Men's role as carers and partners in parenthood is strengthened through family learning. Britain's cultural diversity is enhanced by people of all ages and backgrounds learning together. People's confidence and ability to participate in society grows stronger through secure and supportive family relationships that are based on mutual understanding and shared activities.

12.3 Voluntary organisations have pioneered many of the formal and informal opportunities for family learning. Their ways of working can often teach statutory bodies a great deal about involving local communities. But statutory services also have a great deal of professional experience, skills and resources to offer communities, creating the potential for fruitful co-operation. We hope that the following recommendations will be used to support family learning across Britain.

Recommendations

The main recommendations are that:

(a) wider opportunities for family learning, including parent education, should be available to all families

(b) co-ordination of policy and provision for families urgently needs to be improved at national and local levels

(c) television and other media should take a lead in raising the profile and participation in family learning, much as *On the Move* boosted adult literacy in the 1970s

(d) government should aim to secure adequate funding for family learning, so that everyone has access to affordable, appropriate and effective support at each stage of life.

Specific recommendations for different agencies are as follow:

1 National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and Voluntary Organisations

1.1 That funds be sought to launch a national family learning initiative in partnership with broadcasters, voluntary organisations and other agencies

1.2 That funds be sought to enable a directory of good practice in family learning to be created and maintained.

1.3 That existing networks involved in family learning be supported and strengthened in association with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Local Authority Associations and national bodies involved in family education.

2 Adult Education Services

2.1 That provision for family learning be strengthened and developed in partnership with other agencies.

3 Schools

3.1 That schools actively involve parents and carers as a child's first educator.

3.2 That governing bodies with their staff draw up whole-school policies for working with parents and families.

4 Local Authority Associations

4.1 That the importance of family learning for the effective delivery of a range of local authority programmes, including education, social services, recreation and arts, environmental protection and consumer affairs, be promoted through policy guidelines and a conference for member authorities to share best practice.

5 Local Authorities

5.1 That local authority departments and health services work together with voluntary organisations, faith communities and parents to develop a joint strategy for education and support for families.

5.2 That each agency working with families designates a lead officer to co-ordinate education and support for parents and families.

6 Higher and Further Education

6.1 That further and higher education recognise and support family learning as an integral part of their programmes.

6.2 That long-term longitudinal studies into the effectiveness of family learning programmes are developed.

7 Further Education Funding Council

7.1 That family learning is taken into account as a context for programmes funded under Schedule 2, as a factor relating to basic education and adult literacy.

8 Initial Teacher Training Agency

8.1 That all initial teacher training course include awareness and practical training in supporting parents as their child's first educator, as well as child development, relationships and the pastoral curriculum.

9 Ofsted/HMI

9.1 That Ofsted undertake a national survey of provision for family learning.

9.2 That the Framework for Inspection gives greater prominence to the importance of supporting parents in their role as educators.

10 Training and Enterprise Councils

10.1 That TECs recognise parenting as an important job and provide training, support and guidance for family education.

11 Employers

11.1 That employers recognise the importance of healthy and effective families for society and develop family friendly policies for their staff, customers and local community.

12 The Media: Press, television and radio

12.1 That a television company sponsors a major family learning initiative aimed at putting family learning on the map, just as *On the Move* put adult literacy on the map in the 1970s.

12.2 That editors, producers and journalists recognise and support family learning, particularly through the local press.

12.3 That a greater diversity of images and wider coverage of family matters are presented in the media.

13 Government

13.1 That family learning is supported as an essential element of social policy and that its significance is explicitly acknowledged by all relevant departments in programme, legislation and budget planning.

13.2 That economic policy recognises the importance of family life and gives people incentives to care for and spend time with children and older relatives.

13.3 That all relevant Departments nominate a senior lead officer to co-ordinate policy and provision for family learning and support

13.4 That action be taken to ensure that the initial training of teachers, social workers and health professionals gives due attention to the importance of family learning and working with families.

13.5 That the Department for Education be designated the lead department with respect to family learning on interdepartmental government matters.

13.6 That the Department for Education produce guidance requiring all LEAs to secure adequate provision for family learning and to develop a local inter-agency strategy for family learning and support, as part of the requirement to make adequate provision for further education.

13.7 That the Department for Education makes budgetary provision available for family learning programmes by voluntary organisations and statutory bodies.

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Riches Beyond Price

Making the Most of Family Learning

Photograph: Roger Bradley
Leicestershire Community Education

NIACE: The National Organisation for Adult Learning has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, targeting especially those who do not have easy access owing to barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

NIACE works with national and local government, education providers, broadcasters, TECs, the voluntary sector, employers and others to promote equal opportunities of access to learning for all adults.

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